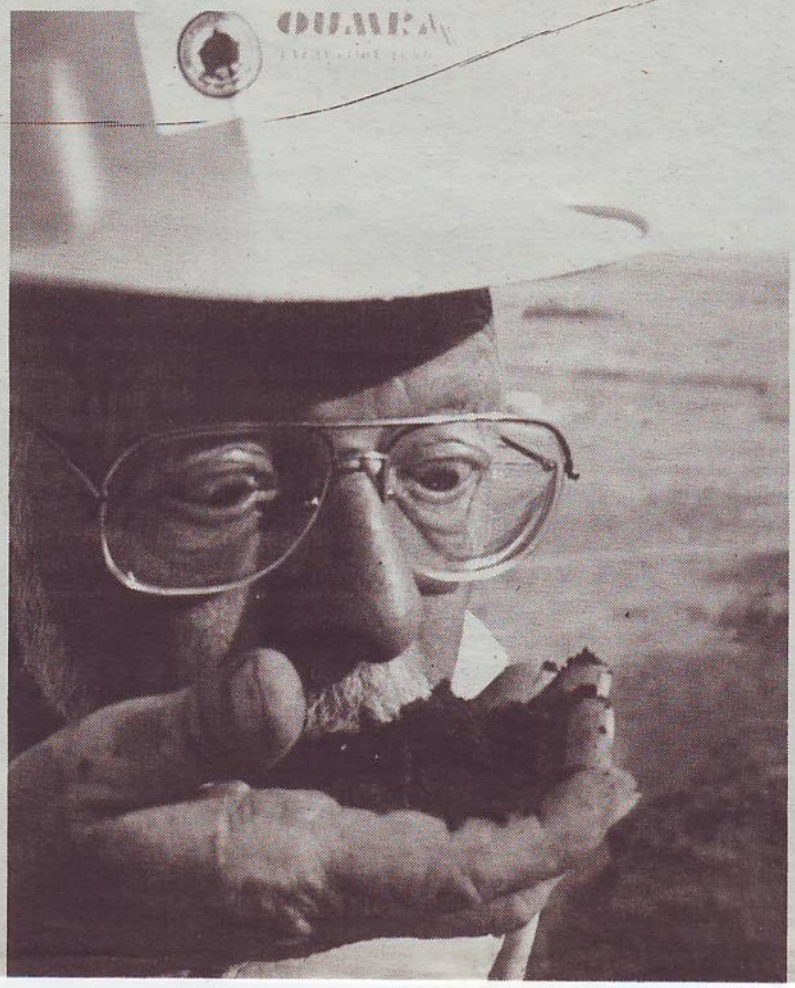
Was incense found near Kumran really for Temple use?

Real-life 'Indiana' Jones looking for Ark of Covenant

Dell Griffin



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Dr. Marvin Antelman, a rabbi and chemical consultant at the Weizmann Institute's Department of Nuclear Physics, said tests run by Bar-Ilan University's mass spectrometry unit have left him "100% convinced" that the substance found last month is the *pitum haketoret*, or incense of the Temple.

Antelman's formal May 8 announcement was made at a press conference outside the cave being excavated by Jones and his team of 40 Christian and B'nai Noah volunteers on the Kumran cliffs south of Kibbutz Almog. The declaration was met with initial skepticism by the rabbinate and Israeli archeologists, who claimed they had never heard of Antelman.

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Antelman said data from tests run by Bar-Ilan University allowed him to identify 10 of the 14 ingredients required for the incense: balm, galbanum, frankincense, myrrh, onycha, cassia, spikenard, saffron, cinnamon bark and cinnamon. Earlier tests at the Weizmann Institute found two other ingredients – karsina lye and wine – but Antelman said he could not determine if the wine was the Cypriot variety mentioned in the incense formula preserved in the Talmud.

Costus, which Antelman said was present in small quantities in the Temple incense, and the unknown "smoke producer," which comprised only 0.1% of the incense formula, were not found in the sample.

Jones said the incense was found beneath a man-made stone structure with a cemented bridge across the top in the northern entrance of the cave some 30 feet below its collapsed ceiling. "The cave was discovered on the last day of the 1989 excavation by a volunteer who fell into what was then a funnel-like cavity," Jones said.

"We are still finding incense in pits cut into the bedrock as we get further into the cave," he added.

The former Baptist preacher, who is now introducing Gentiles to Tora study, announced that he believes he is close to finding a burial stone concealing the entrance to a seventh chamber in the cave. If his wife Zahava Cohen's interpretation of the Copper Scroll is correct, this chamber may contain the desert-built tabernacle of Moses, and possibly the Ark of the Covenant.

Jones said he believes these Temple artifacts were hidden initially by the Prophet Jeremiah in a cave on Mount Nebo (Jordan), but were recovered by the priestly Zadokites who later lived in the area and had access to the writings of the Maccabees, which revealed where the objects were hidden.

However, some Israeli archaeologists are skeptical about Jones's quest, claiming Jones is not an archeologist; they cite the fact that Jones cheerfully admits that the character of Indiana Jones in the movie *Raiders of the Lost Ark* was loosely based on his search for the Ashes of the Red Heifer.

Amos Kloner, an archaeology professor at Bar-Ilan University, claims Jones is wasting his time. "I'm sure the Temple treasures were destroyed," Kloner said, adding that the Copper Scroll has proven to be an unreliable guide.

"Ezra ben Luria wrote that the authenticity of the scroll [discovered in May 1952 but not translated until 1961] would be in doubt until one single thing it mentions was found," Jones said, adding that the discovery of a vial of *shemen afarsimon* (holy anointing oil) nearby in 1988 vindicated the scroll.

Rabbi Menahem Burstin, who visited the cave as a representative of the Chief Rabbinate, said he thought it significant that the first two discoveries relate to the "sweet-smelling aroma" of the Temple sacrifice.

"In the Talmud it says that pilgrims coming from Jericho to Jerusalem could smell this mixture of the *shemen afarsimon* and the *pitum haketoret*, and realized that their eyes would soon behold the Temple itself."

Antelman said the discovery of the incense "is the first scientific evidence to my knowledge that the Zadokites who lived in the Kumran area observed the oral tradition of the Tora." The written Tora mentions a shorter list of ingredients, he explained.

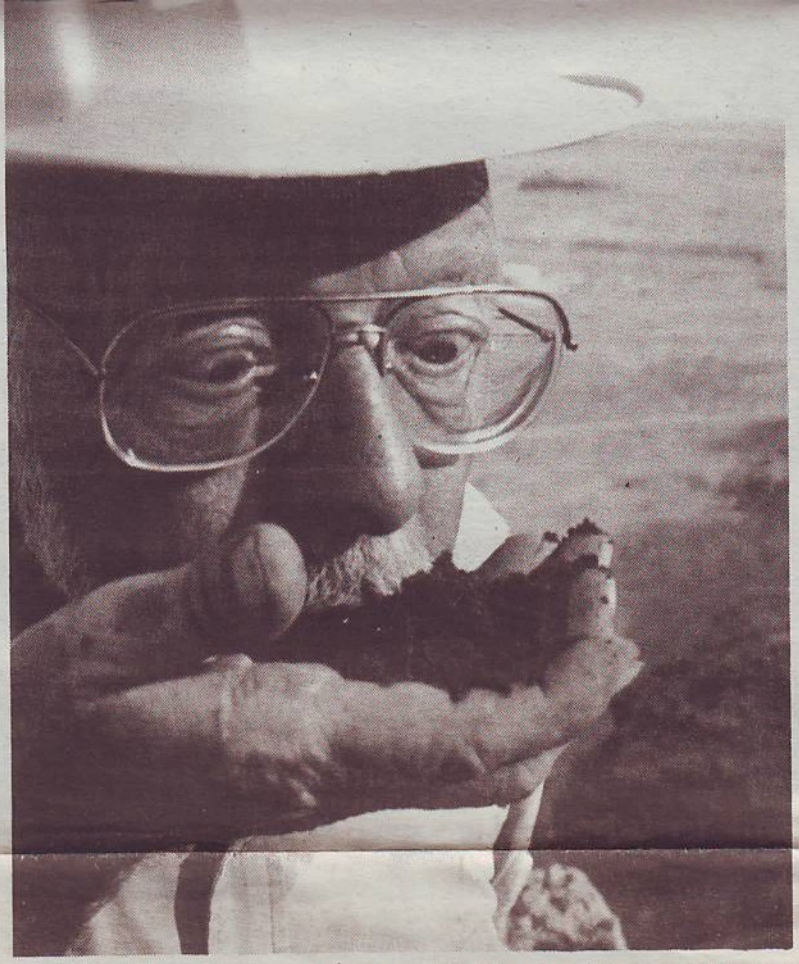
"Unfortunately the incense is too decomposed to be used in Temple ritual," Antelman said. "Most of the volatiles have completely evaporated, but they left their fingerprints behind."

Rabbi Chaim Richman of the Temple Institute in Jerusalem said the find raises other halachic questions. "The fact that this was not found in a container but on the floor of the cave bothers me. Perhaps this was intended as incense but mixed in the wrong proportions or was otherwise defective. How can we know for sure?"

Antelman, Burstin and Richman have encouraged the excavators at Kumran to "keep digging."

"You've found the incense," Antelman said. "It is probable that you will find the other things the Copper Scroll describes as being hidden in that cave."

The Antiquities Authority has declined to give Jones a permit to continue the excavation until he hires an Israeli archeologist who is affiliated with an Israeli archeological institution. Jones claims the first Israeli archeologist whose name he submitted to the Antiquities Authority, Danny Bahat, was turned down because he recently won a lawsuit against the Antiquities Authority in High Court.



Vendyl ('Indiana') Jones takes a whiff of 'red stuff' recently found inside a cave in the Kumran cliffs. The substance, which has the consistency of peat moss and a faint odor of cinnamon, has been found to contain 12 of the 15 ingredients that comprised the sacred incense used in the Second Temple. (Dell Griffin)